

**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
March 14, 2012**

**In SUPPORT of SB 280
*An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital Felonies***

Dr. Khalilah Brown-Dean

Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox, distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Dr. Khalilah Brown-Dean. I am an Associate Professor of Political Science at Quinnipiac University. And the Second Vice President of the Theta Epsilon Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

Today I am here to speak in support of SB 280, which would repeal Connecticut's death penalty. As a professor, I have spent 10 years analyzing and quantifying the impact of crime and punishment on community. The death penalty does nothing to keep us safer – the statistics on crime rates and deterrence make that point abundantly clear. Yet we hold on to this system, and turn a blind eye as it continues to be applied in a biased manner.

I long have understood the death penalty's flaws from the detached perspective of a social scientist. But last year, I came to understand this issue in a much more personal way.

On February 20, 2011, my 21 year-old cousin, Brian Anthony Patterson, was gunned down while attending a party. A 19 year old stood over Brian, and pumped 9 shots into his body as others scrambled for safety.

Brian was a star scholar athlete. He was a son. A beloved big brother. And a cherished cousin. Brian's life mattered.

Last month, the young man who murdered Brian was sentenced to 31 years in prison. At no point did the thought of possibly losing his own life, prevent that young man from taking Brian's. There is simply no deterrent factor to the death penalty.

There are those who say that the death penalty is about bringing closure for victims' families. For us, there is no closure. No sense of peace.

Because the arbitrary way in which we decide which lives are more important, leaves us with a system that is far from just. We know that there are disparities based on class, race, and gender when it comes to who is more likely to receive a death sentence.

To families whose innocence has been shattered in an instant, every loss is heinous. None less painful than another regardless of the circumstances.

Some believe that the answer is to shorten the appeals process. But we know that 140 people have been released from death row due to new evidence. Rushing an execution doesn't bring justice. Instead, it only raises more doubt.

This is not about being soft on crime or coddling criminals. It's about being *smart* on crime and consistent in our values.

As families who fight to honor and affirm the beautiful lives that were taken away from us, we cannot be complicit in taking the life of another.

Who we are as a state, and as a nation, depends on our ability to extend humanity to others. *Even* as they deny it, in themselves.

For when we fail to do so, we become that which we despise. That which we reject. That which we condemn.

Whether at the hands of a brazen 19 year old at a party driven by rage, or at the hands of the state, there is simply no justice in taking the life of another.

Thank you.